

# Elements of a Family Assessment

Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families

**Policy: 700.0075**

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The Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families utilizes the principles of family centered practice in developing a Family Assessment. The purpose of the assessment is to identify, in partnership with the family, the plans and services needed to ensure safety and permanency for the child and child and family well-being. Through the assessment process, risk factors and service needs are identified in a manner that is sensitive to the family's culture and ethnicity. A Family Assessment, which lays the foundation for the Department's intervention with a family, is required for all families receiving services through the Department and must be completed prior to the development of the Service Plan.

A comprehensive assessment of a family initiated early in the process of the Department's involvement is critical in implementing the provisions of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) (PL 105-89). ASFA requires that child safety be the paramount concern in making service provision, placement and permanency planning decisions. ASFA includes provisions that shorten the time frame for making permanency planning decisions and establishes time frames for initiating proceedings to terminate parental rights. Department staff make critical decisions relating to child safety, reunification, family preservation and termination of parental rights based on a comprehensive assessment of the family's strengths, needs and ability to provide a safe, stable home environment within a reasonable period of time.

An evaluation of family functioning and service needs, based on information obtained from the family and other community partners, is essential in completing a comprehensive assessment of the family. It is imperative that Department staff engage families in a way that supports relationship building to effectively evaluate and address the issues that initiated DCYF's involvement. This process includes the engagement of collateral contacts, helps highlight the comprehensive needs of the child and family and begins to identify how multiple agencies can support the family. The assessment process is an ongoing process that evolves as the worker/family relationship builds, providing an opportunity for the family and Department staff to review concerns, strengths and resources together. A Family Reassessment is completed every six months to continually address changes in family functioning throughout the Department's involvement with the family.

A family assessment, which is required for most categories of cases opened to service (excluding Juvenile Corrections), is a systematic approach to the development of a written, comprehensive evaluation of the family. Its design encourages assessment of family and individual functioning, strengths and weaknesses, service needs, client capacity and motivation. While the formalized assessment tools aid in identification of social and environmental problems/needs, the focus of the evaluation is on those areas which require intervention to improve family functioning as it relates to permanency planning. This required family assessment should be completed by the primary service worker within thirty (30) working days of the case opening to the Department.

The components of the family assessment (i.e. assessment tools) include a client/family profile consisting of a needs assessment checklist (Case Profile Checklist, DCYF #147), a family narrative (Case Profile Narrative, DCYF #148), and a viable service plan (Case Plan/Agreement, DCYF #032). In addition, considerable demographic information is collected via the Face Sheet (DCYF #001). Other components of a comprehensive family assessment include ongoing case dictation and any other individual or family based information contained in the case file (ex. GPS

~~data, psychological/psychiatric reports, etc.) or available from other community resources (ex. school reports, medical records, police reports, etc.)~~

~~Case assessment begins with the collection of relevant data which serves as a foundation for a comprehensive family evaluation and is a prerequisite to the development of an effective and operative service plan. Due to the sensitive and often times eruptive nature of case situations, changes in family functioning will frequently occur. Case assessment, therefore, has to be an ongoing, dynamic process. Once the initial case assessment is completed, periodic summaries of the current family situation are made no less frequently than every six (6) months by the primary service worker using the Case Profile Needs Assessment Checklist (DCYF #147) relying partially on ongoing case dictation, with updates to the Case Profile Narrative (DCYF #148). The checklist and narrative are used as a basis for new case plan/agreement development.~~

~~This new system is to be utilized for all new cases opened after the revised date of this policy. For existing caseloads, staff will utilize the Case Profile Needs Assessment Checklist as they review their cases for subsequent case plan development; development of Profile Narratives for these cases is not mandated.~~

~~There are situations where a child/family is active with Family Services and a sibling not opened to the Department is the subject of a CPS investigation which is subsequently indicated with the child removed from the home. In such cases, the Intake worker assigned to the sibling/case contacts and meets with the Direct Service family worker and then completes the Needs Assessment Checklist and the Case Plan/Agreement with input from the family worker.~~

## **Related Procedures**

Family Assessment and Reassessment

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## **Related Policies**

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## Family Assessment and Reassessment

### Procedure From Policy 700.0075: Family Assessment

- A. The Family Assessment (DCYF #148) and Reassessment (DCYF #148A) documents are located in RICHIST and are created for all families receiving services through Family Services Units and for all families of youth active with Probation and Parole Units or sentenced to the Rhode Island Training School.
1. Assessment is an ongoing process that is conducted throughout the Department's involvement with the family.
  2. Each family will have one initial Family Assessment with subsequent Re-Assessments.
    - a. Each parent (including non-custodial parent), significant others living in the home and every child in the family, active or inactive with the Department, will be included in the assessment process. Information is documented in the appropriate sections of the Family Assessment and Reassessment.
    - b. Workers are responsible to complete as much of the Family Assessment and Reassessment as possible to effectively evaluate and address the issues that initiated DCYF's involvement. Efforts to engage family members are documented in the DCYF record.
    - c. Workers are responsible to make efforts to locate absent parent(s) and to document attempts in the DCYF record.
  3. In dual supervision cases, staff from each division enter data into the same Family Assessment or Reassessment.
  4. Once a Family Assessment is approved, a Reassessment may be created at any point.
- B. Timeframes for the completion, review, revision and approval of the Family Assessment
1. Family Services and Probation & Parole Units
    - a. The initial Family Assessment is completed by the assigned Family Services Caseworker/Probation or Parole Officer prior to the development of the Service Plan. The Service Plan must be completed within sixty (60) days of the child's removal from the home or within sixty (60) days of assignment if the child remains at home (refer to RICHIST Window Help: Family Assessment Window).
    - b. In cases where the Family Court has made a finding of Dependency/Neglect/Abuse on a petition filed by the Department and a Service Plan is required to be submitted to the Court within thirty (30) days of the finding, the Family Assessment is completed prior to the development of the Service Plan (refer to Policy 700.0025, Service Plan).
    - c. Revisions can be made to an approved initial Family Assessment for up to six (6) months or until a Reassessment has been created. Revisions to the initial Family Assessment may be necessary prior to the six-month Reassessment if:
      - i. A substantive change in circumstances occurs.
      - ii. More detailed information is obtained on the family.
      - iii. A family re-opens to the Department within six (6) months and it is determined to be appropriate to add to the existing initial assessment after a case consultation between primary worker and supervisor.

- iv. A family transfers to a different division and it is determined to be appropriate to add to the existing initial assessment after a case consultation between primary worker and supervisor.
  - d. If it is appropriate to add information to an existing assessment, primary supervisor authorizes the "reopening" of the assessment and information is added.
  - e. Subsequent Family Reassessments are completed by the assigned Family Service Caseworker/Probation or Parole Officer every six (6) months throughout the Department's involvement with the family.
  - f. In cases where there is dual responsibility, the Probation Officer, FSU Caseworker or the respective supervisors discuss and mutually decide upon primary and secondary assignments in RICHIST and mutual responsibilities in completing the Family Assessment and subsequent Reassessments (refer to Policy 800.0000, Transfer and Dual Supervision of Youth by Juvenile Probation and Family Services).
    - i. Workers will collaborate to determine which sections should be completed by FSU or Probation.
    - ii. If FSU or Probation employees are unable to collaborate or resolve differences, the matter will be referred to the next level in the chain of command.
    - iii. Completed Family Assessment and Reassessment are sent to the primary worker's supervisor for approval. All sections within the Family Assessment must be addressed prior to sending the document for approval.
2. Rhode Island Training School
- a. The initial Family Assessment is completed by the assigned Clinical Social Worker prior to the development of the Service Plan. The Service Plan must be completed within thirty (30) days following adjudication of youth sentenced to the Rhode Island Training School (refer to RICHIST Window Help: Family Assessment Window).
  - b. Revisions can be made to an approved initial Family Assessment for up to six (6) months or until a Reassessment has been created. Revisions to the initial Family Assessment may be necessary prior to the six-month Reassessment if:
    - i. A substantive change in circumstances occurs.
    - ii. More detailed information is obtained on the family.
    - iii. A youth is adjudicated within six (6) months of a previous discharge and it is determined appropriate to add to the existing initial assessment after a case consultation between Clinical Social Worker and supervisor.
    - iv. A youth transfers to the RITS from a different division and it is determined appropriate to add to the existing initial assessment after a case consultation between Clinical Social Worker and supervisor.
  - c. If it is appropriate to add information to an existing assessment, primary supervisor authorizes the "reopening" of the assessment and information is added.
  - d. Subsequent Family Reassessments are completed by the assigned Clinical Social Worker every six (6) months throughout the youth's sentence.
  - e. Completed Family Assessment and Reassessment are sent to the primary worker's supervisor for approval. All sections within the Family

Assessment must be addressed prior to sending the document for approval.

- f. In a case where a youth is at the RITS and his or her siblings are open to Family Services or Probation, workers will collaborate to determine which sections should be completed by FSU, Probation and the RITS.

C. Engaging family systems and collateral contacts

1. The Family Service Caseworker/Probation and Parole Officer/ RITS Clinical Social Worker must make every effort to personally interview family members, including children, in the family's home, when appropriate.
2. Ongoing communication and visits with the family, including individual, parent/child and/or family interviews, are utilized to gather information for the development of a comprehensive assessment of family dynamics and functioning.
3. Contacts are made with extended family, school, mental health, medical and other community providers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the family. A signed Authorization to Obtain or Release Confidential Information (DCYF #007) must be obtained when appropriate.
4. For children receiving services through a Family Services Unit or a Probation and Parole Unit, a coordinated meeting with family members and service providers is scheduled at the beginning of DCYF's involvement to capture comprehensive information about the family. The meeting can be scheduled at a DCYF office, in the family's home, at a community provider's office or at a location appropriate to meet the needs of the family.
5. For youth sentenced to the RI Training School, information to complete the Family Assessment will be gathered at the initial Service Plan meeting. The youth's family members are invited to participate in the meeting (refer to Policy 700.0025, Service Plan).
  - a. The Clinical Social Worker interviews the youth.
  - b. If family members are unable to attend the Service Plan meeting the Clinical Social Worker will attempt to contact each parent (including non-custodial parent), significant others and each child in the family.
6. In the event the family is unwilling to participate in the assessment process and/or worker is unable to gather information to complete one or more sections of the assessment, worker must document efforts to engage the family to obtain necessary information in the DCYF case record.

D. Gathering information and completing the Family Assessment and Reassessment

1. Information collected by the Department relating to the family will be entered into RICHIST in accordance with the time frames detailed in Policy: 700.0100, Rhode Island Children's Information System (RICHIST).
2. Information entered into the various windows of RICHIST will pre-fill into selected sections of the Family Assessment and Reassessment documents.
3. Worker brings a copy of the Family Assessment and/or Reassessment to scheduled meetings to use as a guide in gathering appropriate information on the family.
4. There are seven sections to the Family Assessment. Each section has corresponding topics within the section to capture appropriate information to meet ASFA guidelines.
  - a. Face Sheet Information
  - b. Agency Involvement
  - c. Family History

- i. A separate Family History section is created for each parent and significant other.
    - ii. Each person identified as a caretaker or individual living in the home will be included in the Family History.
  - d. Child/Youth History
    - i. A separate Child/Youth History section is created for each active child.
    - ii. Worker will document who is providing the information on the child.
  - e. Family Dynamics
    - i. Include inactive child(ren) in the family addressing safety and well being status.
    - ii. Worker will document who is providing the information on the child(ren).
  - f. Family Network
  - g. Assessment Summary
- 5. There are ten sections in the Family Reassessment that capture appropriate information to meet ASFA guidelines. The Reassessment addresses both active and inactive child in the family.
  - a. Face Sheet Information
  - b. Safety
  - c. Risk
  - d. Permanency
  - e. Well-Being
  - f. Strengths
  - g. Needs
  - h. Family Situation
  - i. Out of Home Placement/Training School Unit Adjustment
  - j. Ongoing Assessment/Next Steps

E. Distributing the Family Assessment and Reassessments

- 1. The primary service worker must use discretion to maintain the client's right to privacy. A signed Authorization to Obtain or Release Confidential Information (DCYF #007) must be obtained when appropriate (refer to Policy 100.0000: Confidentiality).
- 2. Family Assessment and Reassessments are included in referral packets for treatment providers, placement providers and internal DCYF Care Management Team (CMT) and Resource Management Team (RMT) referrals.
- 3. Family Assessment and Reassessments are available to the Administrative Review Unit (ARU) in RICHIST for review prior to the scheduled date of the Service Plan Review.
- 4. The Family Assessment can be customized during printing by choosing a combination of participants and topics (refer to RICHIST Window Help: Family Assessment Window: Options Button).

## Sources of Information

### **Procedure From Policy 700.0075: Elements of a Family Assessment**

#### **A. Client:**

1. ~~The worker must make every effort to personally interview the parent(s), (including non-custodial parent), the child(ren), siblings, and other individuals significant to family members. The worker can employ individual, parent/child, and family interviews as appropriate toward developing a comprehensive assessment of family dynamics and functioning. More than one (1) interview with primary family members is often necessary;~~
2. ~~The worker should interview each individual in his/her own home. This may not be possible if the individual is out of state (more than 50 miles) or in prison:~~
  - a. ~~The individual may be more at ease in familiar surroundings; and~~
  - b. ~~The worker can gain a better sense of the individual's lifestyle, immediate environment, and community.~~

#### **B. Collateral:**

1. ~~To gain a comprehensive understanding of the family, contacts should be made with extended family, significant others, school, mental health, medical, and other community resources as appropriate;~~
2. ~~All clients must be informed that collateral contacts are being made and must be told the purpose of information sought:~~
  - a. ~~If information is being sought as a result of a child abuse/neglect investigation, permission to proceed with an assessment is not required. However, a signed Release of Confidential Information (DCYF #007) must be obtained when appropriate; and~~
  - b. ~~If the assessment is being made independent of any child abuse/neglect investigation (ex: request for placement), the worker must obtain the client's permission for each collateral contact and must secure a signed Release of Confidential Information (DCYF #007) when appropriate.~~

## ~~Types of Information Gathered~~

### ~~Procedure From Policy 700.0075: Elements of a Family Assessment~~

#### ~~A. Referral Source:~~

- ~~1. Information regarding the nature and source of each referral is documented on the DCYF #071, Intake Summary by the intake worker;~~
- ~~2. Referral information includes the following:~~
  - ~~a. date of referral;~~
  - ~~b. referral source, including referring agency/organization and referrer's name, address, and telephone number; and~~
  - ~~c. reason for referral/services requested.~~

#### ~~B. Demographic Information:~~

- ~~1. Demographic information is documented on the Face Sheet (DCYF #001) which is begun by the intake worker and completed (as necessary) by the Intake worker assigned to the case;~~
- ~~2. Such information includes the following:~~
  - ~~a. Mother:~~
    - ~~(1) name (include maiden name);~~
    - ~~(2) date of birth/death;~~
    - ~~(3) address/phone number;~~
    - ~~(4) marital status (include current marriage and most recent divorce and dates);~~
    - ~~(5) race/ethnic group;~~
    - ~~(6) religion; and~~
    - ~~(7) Social Security number.~~
  - ~~b. Children:~~
    - ~~(1) name, sex, date of birth, date of death;~~
    - ~~(2) race, Social Security number, FC number;~~
    - ~~(3) living arrangement;~~
    - ~~(4) school attending/grade;~~
    - ~~(5) legal status;~~
    - ~~(6) parental custody (which parent has custody);~~
    - ~~(7) doctor; and~~
    - ~~(8) father.~~
  - ~~c. Other Parent/Caretaker:~~
    - ~~(1) name/date of birth;~~
    - ~~(2) Social Security number (only required for other parent);~~
    - ~~(3) marriages (only required for other parent);~~
    - ~~(4) race/religion (only required for other parent); and~~
    - ~~(5) relationship.~~
  - ~~d. Living Arrangement:~~
    - ~~(1) child;~~
    - ~~(2) date;~~
    - ~~(3) type; and~~
    - ~~(4) name, address, telephone number.~~
  - ~~e. Child Medical:~~
    - ~~(1) child;~~



~~(2) medical number/Vet number;~~

~~(3) application date; and~~

~~(4) benefits.~~

~~f. Legal Counsel:~~

~~(1) name;~~

~~(2) address;~~

~~(3) telephone number; and~~

~~(4) for whom.~~

~~g. Employers:~~

~~(1) employer name;~~

~~(2) telephone number;~~

~~(3) mother/father; and~~

~~(4) date.~~

~~h. Other Agencies:~~

~~(1) agency name;~~

~~(2) type/number;~~

~~(3) contact person and telephone number; and~~

~~(4) date.~~

~~i. Legal Action:~~

~~(1) child;~~

~~(2) date;~~

~~(3) Judge;~~

~~(4) type/disposition; and~~

~~(5) return date/reason.~~

~~C. Issue and Service Needs Information:~~

~~1. Issue and service needs information are documented on the Case Profile Needs Assessment Checklist (DCYF #147). Its purpose is to assist the primary service worker in focusing on those issues which require intervention to improve family functioning as it relates to permanency planning;~~

~~2. The Needs Assessment Checklist is used to chart those areas in the family where issues are identified and needs indicated;~~

~~3. An issue exists if the primary service worker, client or either involved person defines it as such. A glossary is provided on the reverse side of the form for definition clarification and consistency;~~

~~4. A Needs Assessment Checklist is completed as the first step in an initial assessment and no less frequently than every six (6) months thereafter;~~

~~5. There are ten (10) categories of issues contained in the Checklist. Within each issue area are identified issue types:~~

~~a. Environmental: Conditions of the home and/or person that are visibly apparent and are related to the basic necessities of food, clothing, and shelter;~~

~~b. Economic: Financial conditions that preclude the provision to adequate basic necessities;~~

~~c. Cultural: Ethnic, racial, religious, or gender related conditions which inhibit participation in or conformance with societal order;~~

~~d. Social/Legal Conduct: Behaviors which are in conflict with the law or other authorities;~~

~~e. Education: Conditions and behaviors which prevent an individual from normal learning development and/or daily functioning;~~

~~f. Support Systems: The lack of external networks which support the social, emotional, economic, and other needs of the family;~~

- ~~g. Physical Health: Physical diseases or conditions which limit a person's capacity, to perform daily life functions;~~
- ~~h. Mental Health: Emotional conditions which adversely affect an individual's inter-personal relationships;~~
- ~~i. Sexual Issues: Individual's sexual actions or responses which are dissatisfying or disturbing to self or others; and~~
- ~~j. Family Functioning: Individual or group behaviors, actions, or conditions that adversely affect family functioning.~~
- ~~6. Elements of Needs Assessment Checklist:~~
  - ~~a. Issues Identification—Worker indicates by a check mark whether:~~
    - ~~(1) an issue exists at this time (YES);~~
    - ~~(2) an issue does not exist at this time (NO); and~~
    - ~~(3) worker doesn't know if an issue exists at this time (DK).~~
  - ~~b. Staff should be careful not to inappropriately or prematurely label a family member as possessing a problem especially in the sensitive areas of mental health and sexual issues without adequate professional diagnosis or other specific determination or documentation. If uncertain, staff should check don't know and subsequently update the information as diagnosis or determination is confirmed. If documentation is required, it is so indicated along with the issue definitions on the back of the checklist sheet;~~
  - ~~c. Whose Issue—Worker indicates in writing to whom the issue belongs:~~
    - ~~(1) If it is the child, the child's name is entered;~~
    - ~~(2) If it is to an adult or other person, the relationship is indicated, such as mother, aunt, stepfather; and~~
    - ~~(3) In some instances, it is appropriate to record "family", particularly in the Family Functioning section.~~
  - ~~d. Service Priority—Worker indicates how the issue will be dealt with by entering the appropriate number, as follows:~~
    - ~~(1) Issue to be addressed in immediate case plan through provision of direct services provided by the Department or through department sponsored services;~~
    - ~~(2) Issue to be addressed in later case plan through provision of departmental services, as needed;~~
    - ~~(3) Issue to be addressed by services from appropriate other agencies;~~
    - ~~(4) Services not planned at this time; and~~
    - ~~(5) A selection of (a) or (b) reflects services (to be provided by the Department or an agency for the Department) that are necessary and directly related to the achievement of case plan objectives.~~
  - ~~e. Notes: Worker indicates any information which would assist one (not familiar with the case) to understand decisions which were made. For example:~~
    - ~~(1) If issue identification includes a particular source of information, worker lists this source;~~
    - ~~(2) If further information is needed before a determination is made, worker records this fact;~~
    - ~~(3) If service priority is (b) or (c), worker explains reason in a phrase or sentence; and~~
    - ~~(4) If service priority is (d), worker indicates why services are not planned, such as parents refuse to cooperate, service not available, issue does not warrant agency action.~~
- ~~D. Family Information:~~
  - ~~1. Family Information is documented on the Case Profile Narrative (DCYF #148);~~
  - ~~2. The Case Profile Narrative is used to provide a family social and assessment summary and is completed based on the Needs Assessment Checklist (DCYF #147) and ongoing dictation. It is updated whenever a new Needs Assessment Checklist is completed or when other case activity so dictates. Sections 3 and 6 of the Narrative must be updated at least every six (6) months. Other sections are updated as needed. To update a section, staff indicate the date~~

and substance of the update on a separate piece of paper. For both initial narratives and updates, this handwritten material is submitted to the supervisor for approval before submission to clerical staff for typing. Typing is done on existing narrative pages until space does not permit at which time a new page is begun;

3. Completion of Form:

- a. reason for opening/agency involvement;
- b. family background (historical), including parents and children;
- c. current situation/problem description;
- d. family strengths narrative;
- e. worker impressions (optional); and
- f. plan for continued services/reason for closing.

4. A copy of the Face Sheet (DCYF #001) cover page is attached to the front of the narrative; and

5. The Case Profile Narrative is signed by the primary service worker and the supervisor and incorporated into the case record following the Case Plan/Agreements and Needs Assessment Checklists.

E. Documentation of Information:

1. The Needs Assessment Checklist (DCYF #147) is completed initially by the primary service worker, and periodic reassessments using the form are made no less frequently than every six (6) months:

- a. The checklist is considered a work product of the primary service worker; and
- b. Each checklist is incorporated into the case record within the section identified for Case Plan/Agreements and Social Summary (now obsolete).

2. The Case Profile Narrative is completed initially based upon the Needs Assessment Checklist and ongoing dictation and is updated at least every six (6) months. It is incorporated into the case record behind the Case Plan/Agreements (DCYF #032) and Problem Checklists;

3. The Case Plan/Agreement (DCYF #032) outlines respective expectations for child, family, and DCYF. It is periodically revised and reviewed in accordance with departmental policy:

- a. The Case Plan/Agreement is used for all children opened to service in Intake, Family Services including Preventive Services, and for children serviced by Probation who are placed in foster/relative/institutional care; and
- b. A specialized Probation Service Plan is used for children serviced by those units who continue to reside in their own homes.

4. All contacts with or about the family must be documented in the case record;

5. Medical, mental health, school and other relevant reports must be requested and incorporated into the case record;

6. Physical, psychological and/or psychiatric examinations if indicated should be arranged with appropriate follow-up;

7. When possible, the written assessment (including documenting data) should be completed prior to the placement of the child(ren) in foster/relative/institutional care:

- a. This helps to ensure that the child will receive the most appropriate and least restrictive placement; and
- b. When an emergency placement is necessary, the family assessment must be completed as soon as possible following the placement and not more than thirty (30) days after the initiation of service to the child.